

ER 62-1788

22 March 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Prospects that the USSR Would Duplicate US Nuclear-Missile Tests in the Pacific

1. Although scientific and technical considerations do not require proof tests of nuclear-missile systems, we believe that the USSR probably tested a number of separate missile systems in its 1961 nuclear test series to satisfy military requirements. It is possible therefore that the USSR considers that it also has a requirement to conduct full-scale tests of nuclear-armed ICBM's. The prospects of adverse world reaction may have restrained Soviet leaders thus far from conducting such tests in the open sea.

2. We believe that prevailing conditions in international affairs would primarily determine whether the USSR elected to duplicate US nuclear-armed missile tests to the Pacific. Adverse world reaction to US tests might restrain Soviet leaders. Or should they elect to make similar tests they might launch nuclear-tipped ICBM's to reduced ranges, thus confining the exercise to Soviet territory. On the other hand, the USSR could cite US tests as a precedent and proceed with similar tests. If US tests resulted in a significant up-grading of world-wide assessments of US military strength the Soviets might feel impelled to demonstrate that they could match or surpass the US capability.

3. On balance, we believe that the chances are better than even that the USSR would follow the US lead. Such a Soviet decision, however, would not necessarily result in an intensive test series; a few tests could fulfill Soviet requirements.

/s/

SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director/
National Estimates

28 March 1962

The Honorable McGeorge Bundy
Special Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
The White House

Dear Mr. Bundy:

X1 Mr. McCone has asked that the at-
X1 tached memo be sent to you. He wants you
to know also of a 19 March conversation he
had with the [redacted]

[redacted] said he feared US
tests of missile systems in the forthcoming
nuclear test series would lead the Soviets
to fire ICBMs with nuclear warheads into
the Pacific and thus escalate the nuclear
testing situation.

Sincerely,

X1 [redacted]
Executive Officer

O/DCI/W. H. Knoche

Orig - Addressee

1 - EO/DCI

✓ 1 - ER

1 - O/DCI (Knoche/Elder)

1 - O/DCI (Alice/June)

EXECUTIVE